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SIPDIS

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HQSOUTHCOM FOR POLAD

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA'S REGIONAL VOTE: PROCESS BODES

BEWILDERMENT

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR 1.4 (D)

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Summary  
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¶11. (C) The voting process for Venezuela's October 31 regional elections is complicated. In a process akin to the recall referendum, voters will elect governors, mayors, and state legislators. Screens will have dozens of options, which are organized by political parties rather than by races. The press has reported that the public did not take advantage of an opportunity to practice voting, and little personal attention will be available on election day, according to a CNE official. End summary.

¶12. (U) Venezuelan voters who go to the polls on October 31 will face an overly complicated process. Voters must first present their identification card for identification in the electoral rolls. Poll workers then will take their fingerprints next to a video monitor that continuously explains the voting process. Next, CNE representatives will again explain the voting process and activate the voting machines. After choosing from a veritable alphabet soup of candidates and parties, the electors will receive and deposit a physical ballot verifying their vote. After dipping their fingers in indelible ink, the voters may leave the polling place.

¶13. (U) From 8,509 candidates, Venezuelan voters will elect 22 governors, 336 mayors, and 229 state legislators. Each voter will have to choose at least four candidates, including a governor (except in the Federal District, whose chief executive is called "mayor," and in Amazonas State), a municipal mayor, and state legislators. Some of legislators are "list deputies," meaning electors will select parties, which will receive portions of legislative seats roughly equal to their proportion of votes. Voters will also choose "nominal deputies" individually.

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Ballots and Screens  
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¶14. (U) Rather than organizing the voters' options by each race, each district's electronic ballot will display numerous logos of political parties and independent candidates. In Anzoategui state, for example, the ballot for governor and state legislators in one electoral district, or "circunscripcion," has 62 logos. Once voters press to choose a logo from the electronic ballot, candidates appear on their computer screen for selection. Voters choose a chief executive, a "party list," and a number of "nominal" legislative candidates for their district. (Smaller districts only have one "nominal" candidate.) Many parties do not have candidates for all the positions, so some voters will have to search for different logos before concluding their vote. After completing this process, voters proceed to another electronic ballot to select a mayor for their municipality. This ballot also displays myriad parties, many of which endorse the same candidate.

¶15. (U) Candidates who have withdrawn from the race will still appear on the screens. If the candidate withdrew before the October 21 deadline, the candidate's votes will go to a candidate he or she designates. If the candidate dropped out afterwards, votes for him or her will not count. According to CNE director Jorge Rodriguez, 194 candidates have dropped out of the race nationwide.

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Inadequate Voter Assistance  
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¶16. (U) The CNE sponsored a mock election October 10 to acquaint the public with the process, but few participated, according to press. TV and radio have also had regular government-sponsored "cadenas" to explain the procedures. Despite the planned presence of explanatory videos at the polls, a CNE official in Anzoategui State told poloff that little personal attention would be available on election day.

The CNE has chosen local electoral officials by lot, and, according to the local official, many of those drafted have

not responded. Press reports add that in some states, few poll workers have appeared for training.

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Comment  
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17. (C) The voting process is slightly less complicated than programming a VCR, yet national CNE officials insist that it will work with minimal difficulties. The staid CNE education campaign, concentrated in the use of ubiquitous "cadenas" which occupy the airwaves regularly at least three times a day, has become a droning noise that attracts little interest.  
Brownfield

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